

My Three Years of German Slavery

ON that fateful August day four years ago when the German army poured across the Belgian frontier I was visiting friends in Brussels. Next day my husband joined his regiment in France, the Second Howitzer Reserve. I have never seen him since. He was killed in battle fourteen months later.

The Germans swept on. Suddenly the patrols of Uhlans galloped into Brussels; then came the Prussian Guard. We were now helpless in the hands of the enemy.

My husband's chateau was near Epinoy, in Northern France. As the German lines pressed rapidly forward into France they soon passed through and beyond Epinoy, and I was permitted to leave Brussels and go to my home.

My home! For three years I was the servant in my own chateau, the humiliated slave of my brutish German masters. My

chateau had been taken for the headquarters of the Fourth Artillery Corps, and from time to time Hindenburg and Ludendorff themselves were there. Twenty miles away was the Great Headquarters of the General Staff, at St. Aubert.

For three years I lived under the shadow of the commanding officers of the great German military machine and overheard their plans, ministered to their brutal desires and saw their monstrous commands executed on the desolated homes and the quivering bodies of my neighbors.

But I will tell this in detail from Sunday to Sunday on this page, all this and a thousand other things which were burned into my brain and heart and soul through the long hours of the endless days and nights of that three years of horror.

LLAINE,
COUNTESS DE GAZA-PASCAL

How France Was Looted OF ITS Treasures

By the Countess de Gaza-Pascal

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(Continued from last Sunday.)

CHAPTER IX.

I AM sure everyone in America has read or heard from soldiers who have come back from the fighting front of that General von Schonmann, of the Uhlans, who has been called the "Wild Beast of Ardenne."

It is said of von Schonmann that he told his Uhlan regiment, when he was its colonel, in the days before the war:

"It is part of the soldier's duty to prepare himself to withstand the dictates of humanity in case of war. He must never know pity; he must never feel gentle. The war that is coming will require men of steel, not flesh."

It is this precept that von Schonmann obeyed when, as brigadier-general, he ordered the women in the Ardenne mutilated as a "lesson in respect for the soldiers of Prussia."

Late in 1916 von Schonmann, now a general of corps, replaced von Beseler as commanding general in the Cambrai theatre of activities. In his Fourth Army Corps, which once was commanded by von Bulow, was a division of his faithful Uhlans. These cavalymen came down from Belgium. Behind them they left a trail of atrocities and rapine unequalled in the history of the war.

And von Schonmann, who became an unwelcome guest in my chateau, just outside Epinoy, was proud of his Uhlans because of this record.

One of his first orders was that I, his hostess, should inform my servants that they were never to leave the premises of the chateau without the permission of his active aide. When I protested that this restriction had never been placed upon me and my household, he said:

"There are many laxities which have become customs which now must be erased. This part of France must be taught what war is and what it means to defy the military might of Germany."

From that time forward, until General von Schonmann was transferred, I, who had been looked upon as one of the representatives of old France in our district, because of my husband's ancestry, was not allowed to leave my front gate without first asking whatever aide of the general's happened to be on duty that day for permission to go abroad.

Throughout the district the same order was enforced, except that the inhabitants were allowed to go abroad during the daylight hours. But they were not allowed to go more than two miles from their homes. If any were caught violating these orders they were arrested and sent into penal servitude—which meant either deportation into Germany or labor in the fields under private soldiers as taskmasters.

During the Fall of 1916, everyone will remember, there was an attempt upon the part of the Germans to break through the British lines beyond Cambrai. There was not the same preparation that was made in 1917 for the big drive toward Paris, but General von Schonmann convinced Crown Prince Rupprecht, then in command of the Third Army, which operated in that sector, that an effort to get through toward the Channel ports might be successful. The effort failed, as the history of the war tells us, but the Germans did take a large number of prisoners. Opposed to the division which occupied the line directly behind Cambrai was the Scottish division. These killed soldiers fought valiantly and held their ground, but thousands of them were captured.

There came a time when the facilities for herding these prisoners at the Cambrai base were taxed to the utmost. A report was made to General von Schonmann that prisoners taken in that sector must be distributed elsewhere or transportation of troops bound to the front would be interfered with.

The exact nature of this report, or if it embodied any suggestion as to the disposal of these prisoners, I cannot say from personal knowledge. My first intimation of its being received by von Schonmann's staff was a conversation regarding it that I overheard one night when the general and his officers lingered at the dinner table over their coffee. At such times as these many important phases of the war in our neighborhood were frankly discussed.

General von Schonmann mentioned the complaint that had come of the congestion of prisoners at Cambrai. Major Forstner, who, as Captain Forstner, already is known for his bayoneting of girls and young women in Belgium, and who was General von Schonmann's chief of the commissary staff, spoke of the order issued by General Stenger, early in 1915, to the Eighty-fifth Brigade of the Ninth Army Corps, of which he was then commander, regarding the disposition of prisoners taken in battle.

"It seems to me, general," I heard Major Forstner say, "this is a time when we might very well adopt this

general order of Stenger's, and if there is any criticism plead the exigencies of the occasion."

General von Schonmann was familiar with Stenger's order. He answered:

"Very well; if you gentlemen are agreed that the situation now demands some similar action to that adopted by the capable Stenger, then we will issue a similar order. You will see that the written document is left unsigned."

It was many days before I could learn just what this order of General Stenger's was. An orderly detailed to my kitchen—a thing which I had regularly to put up with—eventually enlightened one of my girls, and she informed me. Issued in 1915, it ran:

"To date from this day, no prisoners will be made any longer. All prisoners taken will be executed. The wounded, whether armed or defenseless, will be executed. Prisoners, even in large and compact formations, will be executed. Not a man must be left alive who wears the enemy uniform if once he comes within our power."

After that evening when von Schonmann agreed to the reissue of this order no more columns of prisoners passed through Epinoy to Cambrai. For more than five months I did not see a British prisoner, while before that night almost every day was marked by the passing by of at least a handful of downhearted English soldiers, sometimes quite a company or a whole battalion of them, marching toward the prison camp from which they were taken into Germany. When I had escaped to Paris, late in 1917, I told a high army officer whom I had known before the war, of this incident—the decision of von Schonmann that no prisoners must be left alive and thus inconvenience the transportation of troops.

"Are you sure General von Schonmann issued such an order over his own signature?" this French officer asked me.

"He asked that his aides be careful that the order was not signed," I replied.

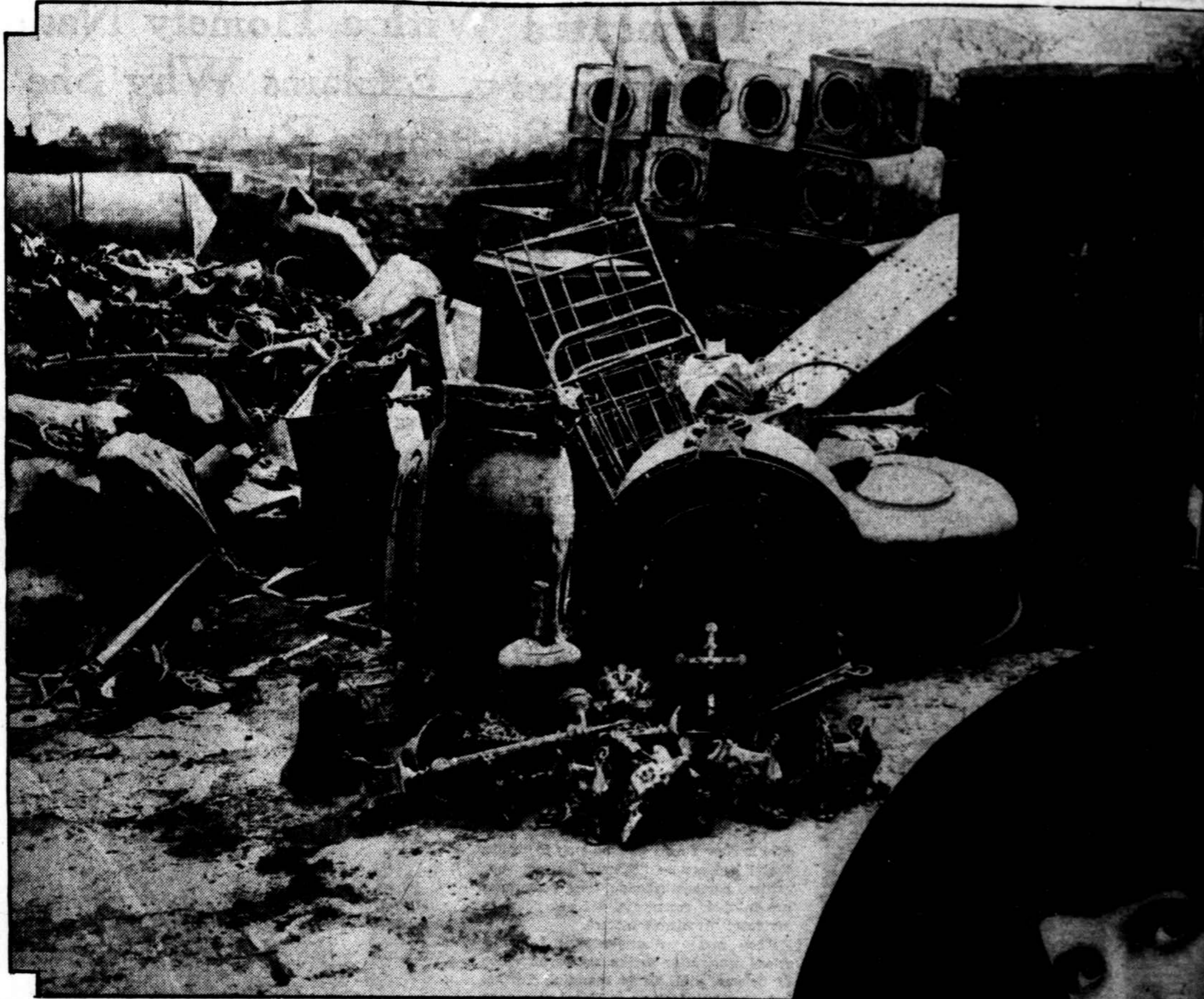
"Ah, that is it. The order was not signed," the French officer exclaimed. "We know that many such orders were issued, but they are never signed. Von Schonmann fears a day of reckoning."

So that was the way—and this incident describes, perhaps what many cannot even now understand, how the German generals will escape punishment for their crimes. They were wary of their official signatures.

It was when the staff of von Schonmann came that the systematic looting of the French territories began. I have often wondered if people back in America really understand just what the looting of the whole of invaded France meant. One morning, when my servants opened the kitchen part of the chateau to begin their day's work, they found shivering on a doorstep, a frail young girl whom they knew as belonging to one of the families in Epinoy. She asked for me, and begged that she be taken in while I was notified, so that no soldier prowling about my grounds might come across her and arrest her for being away from her home that early in the morning.

She told me her name and said that the day before the Germans had come to her house, also to many others, and had searched it thoroughly, taking away every article of value they could find. Among these was a little silver crucifix, worth perhaps forty francs in money, but worth an untold fortune to the little girl, because it was the only thing her mother had left her when she died. It was the crucifix of her grandfather and her great-grandfather, and her mother had wanted her to keep it always. She had noted the number of the soldier's tag and the insignia on his hat and she knew what barracks he had come from. She wondered if I could not speak to one of the staff officers in my chateau, perhaps to General von Schonmann himself, and ask that her crucifix be restored to her.

This was only one of scores, perhaps hundreds, if I could remember them all, of similar incidents. The poor people of our neighborhood seemed to think the officers of the staff at least would be gentlemen, and that I, the Countess, who was their hostess, could ask them for favors. How little they knew that for every favor



This remarkable photograph shows part of a vast assembling of German loot from one of the invaded cities of northern France. It is piled up along a temporary track leading to the main railroad line, the spur showing at the center of the picture having been built especially to facilitate the handling of the spoils.

In thus taking advantage of modern transportation the Germans had an advantage over other marauding hordes of the past—such, for instance, as those of Attila the Hun, Alaric the Goth, Genseric the Vandal, Genghis Khan, and others, who were forced to carry away their loot by the much more cumbersome and primitive means of carts, pack horses, slave-drawn wagons, and so on.

granted me I was in danger of being asked for that kind of payment which would be too much to give.

But the plight of this little French girl was too pitiable. A family crucifix is a thing of inestimable value to some French people. There was one way, I thought, by which I might secure some favorable action for her. A Major Hass, one of the staff officers, had been attracted by a village girl and had compelled me to include her in my household. I dared not refuse when the request was made of me, and I at once took a great interest in the young woman because of her sufferings. She was a pious girl and was well thought of in the village where the Germans had found her, and she asked me to be just to her and understand that she could not help herself.

To this young woman I went immediately and told her of the little girl in the kitchen who wanted her crucifix. I asked her to go bravely to the major and ask, as a favor in return for those she had granted him, his good offices toward finding the precious trinket and restoring it to its owner. The young woman went at once to her German master. He ridiculed her request. I had to turn the little girl out without a bit of comfort. I could only tell her she was suffering just one more pain for France.

A few evenings after that the major told his comrades, at my table, of the preposterous request made of him by a girl whom he had honored by his passing attentions.

"These French women are so impudent, you know," he said, "you allow them to live and then they want you to bother your head about some such nonsense as a family heirloom."

The systematic looting of Epinoy, Arancourt, Bantigny and the other cities in the Cambrai district began, as I have said, shortly after the arrival of General von Schonmann. It was part of his plan to teach "France what war is."

One Sunday afternoon just before sundown sergeants went into every city within the district surrounding my chateau posting notices which ordered all inhabitants to remain indoors the next day until a bugle call announced that they might go about their affairs. Sentries were posted in every street to see that the order was obeyed. There were no telephones, of course, so the residents could not communicate with one another. No soldiers would tell eager questioners what the order meant, if indeed they knew themselves. All that night the people wondered what the morrow was to bring them—what new imposition, or what new danger. If only I could have spread the word I might have told them, for that evening



The "old master" which hung within this frame in the Compiègne Cathedral was ripped out by the German invaders and sent back to Germany. The frame, for some reason, was left behind, although preparations had been made to carry it, also, away.

The Countess Llaïne and, on the historic silver vase the Soissons Cathedral, vandal tried to hammer be slipped into

von Schonmann and his officers discussed to the minutest detail a plan for a general looting of every house and village store the next day.

Certain things, such as metal, tools, mechanical instruments and the knives and ladles to be found in every kitchen, were to be carefully listed, packed by the quartermaster's department, and shipped on returning troop trains to Germany. Other things of value were to be distributed or disposed of as individual officers saw fit. Von Schonmann was particular that the looting be thorough. He was interested, he made it plain, in the "moral effect."

At nine o'clock the next morning soldiers appeared at every doorway. When the door was opened, in answer to their knocks, they marched in, waiting only to search pockets or the dress of whoever admitted them to make sure that no watches, jewelry or hidden money escaped them. Women were searched with the same thoroughness as was exhibited with the men.

Whatever was worth taking was piled in front of each house. Quartermaster carts, drawn by soldiers, then